

VZCZCXRO2379
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #1617/01 2131143
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 011143Z AUG 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4777
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001617

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958:N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: "ICON OF DEMOCRACY" PRESIDENT CORY AQUINO PASSES AWAY

REF: MANILA 1414 (IN POOR HEALTH, FORMER PRESIDENT CORY AQUINO
FIGHTS ONE LAST BATTLE)

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Former President Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, cherished as "President Cory" by the people of the Philippines, passed away August 1 at Makati Medical Center surrounded by family and friends. Hospitalized for her deteriorating health since late June (reftel), Aquino succumbed to heart failure as a result of advanced colon cancer. President Arroyo, in the U.S. for her July 30 White House meeting, declared ten-days of mourning to honor the former President and said she would return home ahead of schedule. While Malacanang has offered a state funeral for the former president, the Aquino family's plans for a funeral continue to evolve. A spokesperson said the family preferred holding a funeral mass on August 5 instead of a formal state funeral, although Aquino family members have advised the Charge d'Affaires that the funeral mass could resemble a state funeral. Having prayed for weeks for her recovery, Filipinos are mourning the loss of their most beloved president, memorializing her through their continued prayers and an outpouring of yellow ribbons. The Ambassador offered condolences in an official press statement and ordered Mission flags on all compounds to fly at half-mast. The Charge d'Affaires represented the Ambassador at the opening of Aquino's wake on August 1.

A DIFFICULT BATTLE AGAINST CANCER

2. (SBU) Hospitalized since late June for her deteriorating health, "President Cory" passed away at 3:18 a.m. on August 1, in her private room at Makati Medical Center. President Corazon Aquino had been fighting stage-four colon cancer that spread to other parts of her body, and, as of early July, was not expected to recover (reftel). Family friends joined Aquino's five children, who include a senator and a celebrity, at the former president's side during her final moments. In an early morning statement, Aquino's son Senator Benigno Aquino III thanked the public for their prayers and support, and said it was his mother's wish that Filipinos pray for one another and for their country.

PRESIDENT ARROYO OFFERS CONDOLENCES

3. (SBU) On an intended ten-day trip to the U.S. for a July 30 White House meeting and other engagements, President Arroyo publicly expressed her condolences to Aquino's family and said that the Philippines had "lost a national treasure." Arroyo declared a "ten-day period of national mourning" to honor and memorialize the former president. Arroyo was originally expected to return to the Philippines on August 5, although Arroyo's Executive Secretary Eduard Ermita said from New York that Arroyo would return earlier, with an announcement about her return trip to be made August 1 at 11:00 p.m. U.S. East Coast time. Illustrating President Aquino's unique place in the pantheon of Philippine leaders, a Malacanang Palace press release called her "the country's icon of democracy" for her leadership of the successful 1986 uprising against dictator

President Ferdinand Marcos, hailing her as an "inspiration" to nations around the world seeking freedom from tyranny and dictatorship.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

14. (SBU) Information available as of this report indicates that the wake for President Aquino began August 1, 5:00 p.m. at the LaSalle School gymnasium in Greenhills, Mandaluyong City, and would conclude by early morning Tuesday, August 4. The Ambassador asked the Charge d'Affaires to represent her at the wake. For the funeral, a requiem mass will be held Wednesday, August 5, 9:00 a.m. at the Manila Cathedral in the old walled city of Manila, after which President Aquino will be laid to rest next to her late husband Ninoy Aquino at Manila Memorial Park cemetery in Paranaque City. While Malacanang has offered a state funeral for the former president, the Aquino family's plans continue to evolve. A spokesperson said the family preferred holding a requiem mass instead of a formal state funeral, though family members at the wake indicated to the Charge d'Affaires that the requiem mass could be similar to a state funeral. President Arroyo may also decide to hold a separate memorial service after her return to the Philippines. An ongoing public vigil is being held at the Epifanio de los Santos (EDSA) shrine in Quezon City, the site where President Aquino led protesters against President Marcos in 1986.

A NATION, AND THE U.S. MISSION, REACT

15. (SBU) The passing of President Aquino has dominated all Philippine broadcast and print media reporting since the news spread

MANILA 00001617 002 OF 002

in the early morning hours. Media have reported extensively on comments made in Washington by Secretary Clinton as well as the Ambassador, who was there for the official visit of President Arroyo. Communities around the Philippines, from Luzon to Mindanao, are mourning the loss of President Aquino, displaying yellow ribbons in her honor. Provincial governors and religious leaders are expressing condolences to the Aquino family through public announcements and prayers, and are preparing for special religious services on Sunday, August 2.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador ordered the Mission to honor the memory of President Aquino with flags lowered to half-staff, including those at the Manila American Cemetery, and through the prominent display of yellow ribbons on Mission compounds. In a press statement, the Ambassador offered heartfelt condolences to the Aquino family and the Philippine people, noting Cory's leadership in the People Power revolution and, for the past 20 years, her close work with the U.S. Embassy in helping to select the annual recipients of the Ninoy Aquino Fellowships given for public service and journalism. The Charge d'Affaires represented the Ambassador at the August 1 wake at LaSalle Greenhills.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Post will continue to be in communication with the Aquino family's spokesperson and Philippine officials as the Aquino family makes decisions regarding arrangements for the August 5 funeral.

BASSETT